

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

The President's News Conference

April 13, 2010

The President. Good afternoon, everybody. We have just concluded an enormously productive day.

I said this morning that today would be an opportunity for our nations, both individually and collectively, to make concrete commitments and take tangible steps to secure nuclear materials so they never fall into the hands of terrorists, who would surely use them.

This evening I can report that we have seized this opportunity, and because of the steps we've taken, as individual nations and as an international community, the American people will be safer and the world will be more secure.

I want to thank all who participated in this historic summit: 49 leaders from every region of the world. Today's progress was possible because these leaders came not simply to talk, but to take action; not simply to make vague pledges of future action, but to commit to meaningful steps that they are prepared to implement right now.

I also want to thank my colleagues for the candor and cooperative spirit that they brought to the discussions. This was not a day of long speeches or lectures on what other nations must do. We listened to each other with mutual respect. We recognized that while different countries face different challenges, we have a mutual interest in securing these dangerous materials.

So today is a testament to what is possible when nations come together in a spirit of partnership to embrace our shared responsibility and confront a shared challenge. This is how we will solve problems and advance the security of our people in the 21st century. And this is reflected in the communique that we have unanimously agreed to today.

First, we agreed on the urgency and seriousness of the threat. Coming into this summit, there were a range of views on this danger. But at our dinner last night and throughout the day, we developed a shared understanding of the risk.

Today we are declaring that nuclear terrorism is one of the most challenging threats to international security. We also agreed that the most effective way to prevent terrorists and criminals from acquiring nuclear materials is through strong nuclear security, protecting nuclear materials and preventing nuclear smuggling.

Second, I am very pleased that all the nations represented here have endorsed the goal that I outlined in Prague 1 year ago: to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world in 4 years time. This is an ambitious goal, and we are under no illusions that it will be easy. But the urgency of the threat and the catastrophic consequences of even a single act of nuclear terrorism demand an effort that is at once bold and pragmatic. And this is a goal that can be achieved.

Third, we reaffirmed that it is the fundamental responsibility of nations, consistent with their international obligations, to maintain effective security of the nuclear materials and facilities under our control. This includes strengthening national laws and policies and fully implementing the commitments we have agreed to.

And fourth, we recognized that even as we fulfill our national responsibilities, this threat cannot be addressed by countries working in isolation. So we've committed ourselves to a sustained, effective program of international cooperation on national security, and we call on other nations to join us.

It became clear in our discussions that we do not need lots of new institutions and layers of bureaucracy. We need to strengthen the institutions and partnerships that we already have and make them even more effective. This includes the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the multilateral partnership that strengthens nuclear security, prevent nuclear trafficking, and assist nations in building their capacity to secure their nuclear materials.

But as I said, today was about taking tangible steps to protect our people. So we've also agreed to a detailed work plan to guide our efforts going forward, the specific actions we will take. I want to commend my partners for the very important commitments that they made in conjunction with this summit. Let me give some examples.

Canada agreed to give up a significant quantity of highly enriched uranium. Chile has given up its entire stockpile. Ukraine and Mexico announced that they will do the same. Other nations, such as Argentina and Pakistan, announced new steps to strengthen port security and prevent nuclear smuggling.

More nations, including Argentina, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, agreed to join, and thus strengthen, the treaties and international partnerships that are at the core of our global efforts. A number of countries, including Italy, Japan, India, and China, will create new centers to promote nuclear security technologies and training. Nations pledged new resources to help the IAEA meet its responsibilities.

In a major and welcome development, Russia announced that it will close its last weapons-grade plutonium production reactor. After many years of effort, I'm pleased that the United States and Russia agreed today to eliminate 68 tons of plutonium for our weapons programs, plutonium that would have been enough for about 17,000 nuclear weapons. Instead, we will use this material to help generate electricity for our people.

These are exactly the kinds of commitments called for in the work plan that we adopted today, so we've made real progress in building a safer world.

I would also note that the United States has made its own commitments. We are strengthening security at our own nuclear facilities and will invite the IAEA to review the security at our neutron research center. This reflects our commitment to sharing the best practices that are needed in our global efforts. We're seeking significant funding increases for programs to prevent nuclear proliferation and trafficking.

And today the United States is joining with our Canadian partners in calling on nations to commit \$10 billion to extending our highly successful global partnership to strengthen nuclear security around the world.

So this has been a day of great progress. But as I said this morning, this can't be a fleeting moment. Securing nuclear materials must be a serious and sustained global effort. We agreed to have our experts meet on a regular basis to measure progress, to ensure that we're meeting our commitments, and to plan our next steps.

And I again want to thank President Lee and the Republic of Korea for agreeing to host the next Nuclear Security Summit in 2 years.

Finally, let me say, while this summit's focused on securing nuclear materials, this is part of a larger effort: the comprehensive agenda that I outlined in Prague last year to pursue the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. Indeed, in recent days, we've made progress on every element of this agenda.

To reduce nuclear arsenals, President Medvedev and I signed the historic new START Treaty, not only committing our two nations to significant reductions in deployed nuclear weapons but also setting the stage for further cuts and cooperation between our countries.

To move beyond outdated cold war thinking and to focus on the nuclear dangers of the 21st century, our new Nuclear Posture Review reduces the role and number of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy. And for the first time, preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism is at the top of America's nuclear agenda, which reaffirms the central importance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

And next month in New York, we will join with nations from around the world to strengthen the NPT as the cornerstone of our global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, even as we pursue greater civil nuclear cooperation. Because for nations that uphold their responsibilities, peaceful nuclear energy can unlock new advances in medicine, in agriculture, and economic development.

All of these efforts are connected. Leadership and progress in one area reinforces progress in another. When the United States improves our own nuclear security and transparency, it encourages others to do the same, as we've seen today. When the United States fulfills our responsibilities as a nuclear power committed to the NPT, we strengthen our global efforts to ensure that other nations fulfill their responsibilities.

So again, I want to thank my colleagues for making this unprecedented gathering a day of unprecedented progress in confronting one of the greatest threats to our global security. Our work today not only advances the security of the United States, it advances the security of all mankind. And preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism will remain one of my highest priorities as President of the United States.

So with that, I'm going to take a few questions, and I'm going to start with Bill Plante from CBS.

Nuclear Security Summit Commitments

Q. Mr. President, thank you. The communique states in no uncertain terms that all of the unprecedented cooperation for which you're calling will be done on a voluntary basis, not a binding commitment. What's the likelihood that countries which have been at odds over these issues for a number of years are now going to cooperate? How can this be enforced?

The President. Well, let's just take a specific example, Bill. For about 10 years, we had been encouraging Ukraine to either ship out its highly enriched uranium or transform it to a lower grade—a lower enriched uranium. And in part because of this conference, Ukraine took that step, announced that it would complete this step over the next couple of years.

So all the commitments that we talked about are ones that we've already booked, even before the communique and the work plan gets put into place. And that indicates the degree to which I think that there's actually strong unanimity about the importance of this issue as a threat to the global and international community.

Now, keep in mind that we also have a number of international conventions that have been put in place. Not all of them have been ratified. In fact, the United States needs to work on a couple of these conventions dealing with the issues of nuclear terrorism and trafficking. But what this does is it sets out a bold plan. And what I'm encouraged about is the fact that we've already seen efforts that had been delayed for years—in some cases, since the end of the cold war—actually finally coming to fruition here at this summit.

Q. It all depends on good will, sir.

The President. Bill, the point is that we've got world leaders who have just announced that, in fact, this is a commitment that they're making. I believe they take their commitments very seriously.

If what you're asking is, is do we have a international, "one world" law enforcement mechanism—we don't. We never have.

All right? So in all of our efforts internationally, in every treaty that we sign, we're relying on good will on the part of those who are signatories to those efforts. That's the nature of international relations.

Jake Tapper, ABC.

Iran/Nuclear Nonproliferation

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said today that pressure and sanctions—speaking of Iran's nuclear program—pressure and sanctions cannot fundamentally solve the problem. I was wondering if you could clarify exactly what you believe President Hu Jintao has agreed to, whether you think there actually will be economic sanctions with teeth that the Chinese will sign off on, and what you have told the Chinese in terms of their concern about how much fuel they get from Iran, what the U.S. can help them with in that regard. Thank you, sir.

The President. Here's what I know. The Chinese have sent official representatives to negotiations in New York to begin the process of drafting a sanctions resolution. That is part of the P5-plus-1 effort. And the United States is not moving this process alone. We've got the participation of the Russians as well as the other members of the P5-plus-1, all of whom believe that it is important for us to send a strong signal to Iran that their consistent violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions as well as their obligations under the NPT have consequences and that they've got a better path to take.

Now, you're exactly right, Jake, that the Chinese are obviously concerned about what ramifications this might have on the economy generally. Iran is an oil-producing state. I think that a lot of countries around the world have trade relationships with Iran. And we're mindful of that. But what I said to President Hu and what I've said to every world leader that I talk to is that words have to mean something, there have to be some consequences. And if we are saying that the NPT is important, if we're saying that nonproliferation is important, then when those obligations are repeatedly flouted, then it's important for the international community to come together.

And what I would say is that if you consider where we were, say, a year ago, with respect to the prospect of sanctions, the fact that we've got Russia and China as well as the other P5-plus-1 members having a serious discussion around a sanctions regime, following up on a serious sanctions regime that was passed when North Korea flouted its obligations towards the

NPT, it's a sign of the degree to which international diplomacy is making it more possible for us to isolate those countries that are breaking their international obligations.

And as I said, I think, several weeks ago, my interest is not having a long, drawn-out process for months. I want to see us move forward boldly and quickly to send the kind of message that will allow Iran to make a different calculation.

And keep in mind, I have said repeatedly that under the NPT, Iran has the right to develop peaceful civilian nuclear energy, as do all signatories to the NPT. The—but given the repeated violations that we've seen on the part of Iran, I think, understandably, the world community questions their commitment towards a peaceful civilian energy program.

They have a way of restoring that trust. For example, we put before them—I'm saying the P5-plus-1, now, as well as the IAEA—put before them a very reasonable approach that would have allowed them to continue their civilian peaceful nuclear energy needs, but would have allayed many of the concerns around their nuclear weapons program. They have rejected that so far. And that's why it's important—and I said from the start that we're going to move on a dual track, and part of that dual track is making sure that a sanctions regime is in place.

Last point I'll make about sanctions. Sometimes I hear the argument that, well, sanctions aren't really going to necessarily work. Sanctions aren't a magic wand. What sanctions do accomplish is, hopefully, to change the calculus of a country like Iran so that they see that there are more costs and fewer benefits to pursuing a nuclear weapons program. And in that process, what we hope is, is that if those costs get high enough and the benefits are low enough, that in time, they make the right decision, not just for the security and prosperity of the world, but also for their own people.

Scott Wilson, Washington Post. Where's Scott? There we go.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons/Israel

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You have spoken often about the need to bring U.S. policy in line with its treaty obligations internationally to eliminate the perception of hypocrisy that some of the world sees toward the United States——

The President. Right.

Q. ——and its allies. In that spirit and in that venue, will you call on Israel to declare its nuclear program and sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty? And if not, why wouldn't other countries see that as an incentive not to sign on to the treaty that you say is important to strengthen?

The President. Well, Scott, initially you were talking about U.S. behavior, and then suddenly we were talking about Israel. Let me talk about the United States. I do think that as part of the NPT, our obligation as the largest nuclear power in the world is to take steps to reducing our nuclear stockpile. And that's what the START Treaty was about, sending a message that we are going to meet our obligations.

And as far as Israel goes, I'm not going to comment on their program. What I'm going to point to is the fact that consistently we have urged all countries to become members of the NPT.

So there's no contradiction there. We think it is important that we have a international approach that is universal and that rests on three pillars: that those of us who have nuclear weapons are making serious efforts to reduce those stockpiles; that we all are working against

the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and those countries that don't currently have nuclear weapons make the decision not to pursue nuclear weapons; and that all countries have access to peaceful nuclear energy.

And so whether we're talking about Israel or any other country, we think that becoming part of the NPT is important. And that, by the way, is not a new position. That's been a consistent position of the United States Government even prior to my administration.

Let me call on Stephen Collinson of AFP [Agence France-Presse].

China-U.S. Relations/Chinese Economy

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. In your meeting with President Hu, did he give you any indication he would heed your call for a more market-oriented exchange rate for the yuan? If there's going to be a change, when would you envisage that taking place? And what happened in the last few weeks to help you move on from a period of—quite a stormy period of public disagreements with China?

The President. The fact is, actually, that the relationship between my administration and the Chinese Government has been very productive during the course of the last year and a half. We started off working together at various multilateral fora, the first one in London with the G–20. I then, out of the bilateral meetings that we had, worked with President Hu to set up a Strategic and Economic Dialogue that looks at a whole range of areas in which the United States and China can cooperate. I made a visit to China that both of us considered very successful.

Now, there are some areas where we've got disagreement. And those disagreements are not new, and I have to say that the amount of turbulence, as you put it, that occurred was actually relatively modest when you look at the overall trajectory of U.S.-China relations. I mean, at no point was there ever a suggestion that it's not in the interests of both our countries to cooperate, and that we have not only important bilateral business to do, but also, we are two very important countries in multilateral settings that have to deal with issues like climate change and the world economy in concert.

With respect to the currency issue, President Hu and I have had a number of frank conversations. As part of the G–20 process, we all signed on to the notion that a rebalancing of the world economy would be important for sustained economic growth and the prevention of future crises. And China, like the United States, agreed to that framework.

We believe that part of that rebalancing involves making sure that currencies are tracking, roughly, the market and not giving any one country an advantage over the other. And I've been very clear of the fact that it is my estimation that the RMB is undervalued and that China's own decision in previous years to begin to move towards a more market-oriented approach is the right one. And I communicated that once again to President Hu. I think China, rightly, sees the issue of currency as a sovereign issue. I think they are resistant to international pressure when it comes to them making decisions about their currency policy and monetary policy.

But it is my belief that it is actually in China's interest to achieve this rebalancing, because over time, China is going to have to shift away from an economy that is solely oriented on exports and is going to have to start shifting towards an economy that is emphasizing domestic consumption and production and is preventing bubbles from building up within the economy. And all of that will be facilitated with a more market-oriented currency approach.

So I don't have a timetable, but it is my hope that China will make a decision that ultimately will be in their best interest.

Bob Burns of AP [Associated Press].

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, a few minutes ago, when you were explaining the purpose of sanctions against Iran, you said the point is to change Iranian Government calculations, leading to altered behavior. Why hasn't that happened in the case of North Korea, which, unlike Iran, actually does have nuclear weapons?

The President. Well, I'm not going to give you a full dissertation on North Korean behavior. I think it's fair to say that North Korea has chosen a path of severe isolation that has been extraordinarily damaging to its people and that it is our hope that as pressure builds for North Korea to improve its economic performance, for example, to break out of that isolation, that we'll see a return to the six-party talks and that we will see a change in behavior.

Now, as I said, I—sanctions are not a magic wand. Unfortunately, nothing in international relations is. But I do think that the approach that we've taken with respect to North Korea makes it more likely for them to alter their behavior than had there been no consequences whatsoever to them testing a nuclear weapon. Okay?

Chuck Todd [NBC News].

Pakistan

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Given the goals of this conference and the goals of your administration on nuclear policy, why does it appear as if Pakistan is playing by a different set of rules? I know they have not signed on to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but it appears they're expanding their nuclear program and the proximity to Al Qaida. Should there be more pressure internationally on Pakistan, not just coming from the United States, but the world?

The President. I don't think Pakistan's playing by a different set of rules. I think we've been very clear to Pakistan, as we have been to every country, that we think they should join the NPT. I have actually seen progress over the last several years with respect to Pakistan's nuclear security issues.

I want to lower tensions throughout South Asia when it comes to nuclear programs. And I think that the fact that President Gilani came here, signed on to a communique, and made a range of commitments that will make it more likely that we don't see proliferation activities or trafficking occurring out of Pakistan is a positive thing.

Do we have a lot of more work to do? Absolutely. But I think that President—or Prime Minister Gilani's presence here was an important step in assuring that we do not see a nuclear crisis anywhere in South Asia. Okay?

All right, Jeff Mason [Reuters].

Pakistan's Nuclear Security Program/Sanctions Against Iran

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. A followup question on two that have been asked: First, how realistic do you believe it is that countries will agree on sanctions in the coming weeks, which is the deadline that you're looking for? And a second, a followup on Pakistan: Is the United States

confident that Pakistan's nuclear materials are protected and will not be vulnerable to terrorists like Al Qaida?

The President. Yeah. To take the second question first, just as a part of a followup on Chuck's question, I feel confident about Pakistan's security around its nuclear weapons programs. But that doesn't mean that there isn't improvement to make in all of our nuclear security programs. I mean, you'll recall that we had a little incident a while back where we had nuclear-tipped missiles on a bomber flying across the United States, and nobody knew about it. And Secretary Gates took exactly the right step, which was to hold those in charge accountable and to significantly alter our practices to make sure something like that didn't happen again.

So I think it's important to note that every nuclear power, every country that has a civilian nuclear energy program has to take better steps to secure these materials. And Pakistan is not exempt from that, but we aren't either. And that's, I think, the goal of this summit, and that was the goal of the communique and the work plan that we've put forward.

With respect to sanctions, I think that we have a strong number of countries on the Security Council who believe this is the right thing to do. But I think these negotiations can be difficult. And I am going to push as hard as I can to make sure that we get strong sanctions that have consequences for Iran as it's making calculations about its nuclear program and that those are done on a timely basis. I'm not going to speculate beyond that in terms of where we are.

Last question, Ed Chen of Bloomberg.

U.S. Foreign Policy/Middle East Peace Process

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Good afternoon. Given the progress you have cited in recent days on your foreign policy agenda, to what extent do you feel like you have gained political capital with which to take further to the international stage for the rest of this year to perhaps rejuvenate some initiatives in trouble spots such as the Middle East and elsewhere?

The President. Well, I think the work that we've done in recent days around nuclear security and nuclear disarmament are intrinsically good. They're good just in and of themselves. And so we're very pleased with the progress that we've made. And we could not have done this without extraordinary cooperation first from President Medvedev, when it came to the START Treaty, and then from my colleagues who were here today, when it came to this nuclear security summit.

What I think it signifies is the fact that so many of the challenges that we face internationally can't be solved by one nation alone. But I do think that America's leadership is important in order to get issues on the international agenda and to move in concert with other countries to have an effective response.

There are a host of other issues, obviously, that have to be addressed. And one of the points that was made, actually, during the communique is we're talking here about the instruments of potential war or terrorism, but obviously there are also the reasons, the rationales, the excuses for conflict that have to be addressed as well.

And I remain committed to being a partner with countries around the world, and in particular hot spots around the world, to see if we can reduce those tensions and ultimately resolve those conflicts. And the Middle East would be a prime example. I think that the need for peace between Israelis and Palestinians and the Arab States remains as critical as ever.

It is a very hard thing to do. And I know that even if we are applying all of our political capital to that issue, the Israeli people, through their Government, and the Palestinian people, through the Palestinian Authority, as well as other Arab States may say to themselves, we are not prepared to resolve this—these issues no matter how much pressure the United States brings to bear.

And the truth is, in some of these conflicts, the United States can't impose solutions unless the participants in these conflicts are willing to break out of old patterns of antagonism. I think it was former Secretary of State Jim Baker who said, in the context of Middle East peace, "We can't want it more than they do."

But what we can make sure of is, is that we are constantly present, constantly engaged, and setting out very clearly to both sides our belief that not only is it in the interests of each party to resolve these conflicts, but it's also in the interest of the United States. It is a vital national security interest of the United States to reduce these conflicts, because whether we like it or not, we remain a dominant military superpower, and when conflicts break out, one way or another, we get pulled into them. And that ends up costing us significantly in terms of both blood and treasure.

So I'm going to keep on at it. But I think on all these issues—nuclear disarmament, nuclear proliferation, Middle East peace—progress is going to be measured not in days, not in weeks. It's going to take time. And progress will be halting. And sometimes we'll take one step forward and two steps back, and there will be frustrations. And so it's not going to run on the typical cable news—24/7 news cycle, but if we're persistent and we've got the right approach, then over time, I think that we can make progress.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 4:36 p.m. at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to President Dmitry A. Medvedev of Russia; and Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani of Pakistan. A reporter referred to Jiang Yu, Deputy Director-General, Information Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of a portion of these remarks.

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(IAEA); Canada : Highly enriched uranium stocks, partial disposal; Chile : Highly enriched uranium stocks, disposal ; China : President; China : Relations with U.S.; China : Strategic and Economic Dialogue, U.S.-China; China : Trade and economic practices; Commerce, Department of : Standards and Technology, National Institute of :: Neutron Research, Center for; Commerce, international : Currency rates; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Stabilization efforts; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G–20) nations; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Energy : Nuclear energy; Environment : Climate change; Iran : International trade relationships; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iran : U.N. Security Council sanctions; Mexico : Highly enriched uranium stocks, disposal ; Middle East : Peace and democracy efforts; North Korea : International and U.S. sanctions; North Korea : Nuclear weapons development; North Korea : Six-party talks; Pakistan : Nuclear weapons and material, security improvement efforts; Pakistan : Prime Minister; Russia : Nuclear energy; Russia : President; Russia : Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with U.S., expansion; Russia : Weapons-grade plutonium stocks, reduction; Russia : Zheleznogorsk plutonium reactor, closure; South Korea : 2012 Global Nuclear Security Summit; South Korea : President; Ukraine : Highly enriched uranium stocks :: Disposal; United Nations : Reform.

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